



NASW

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TESTIMONY SUPPORTING SB-168: AN ACT ESTABLISHING A RIGHT TO HOUSING

Housing Committee

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Presented By: Gina R. Rosich, PhD, MSW

Dear Honorable Chairpersons Lopes and Phipps, Vice Chairs Anwar and Smith, Ranking Members Cicarella and Polletta, and all other Members of the Committee on Housing of the Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Dr. Gina Rosich, a resident of West Hartford, a faculty member of the University of Saint Joseph Department of Social Work and Equitable Community Practice, and a member of the Education and Legislative Action Network at the National Association of Social Workers Connecticut Chapter. I am submitting this testimony on behalf of the National Association of Social Workers, CT chapter, which represents over 2,300 members. We call upon the Committee on Housing to support *Senate Bill 168: An Act Establishing a Right to Housing*.

The legislative agenda for NASW-CT includes taking the position to advance racial, economic, and social justice. NASW-CT believes that every Connecticut resident and family should be able to meet their basic human need for housing, and supports the promotion of policies that work to eliminate inequities and disparities relating to race, class, and ethnicity.

Housing insecurity in the state of Connecticut is first and foremost an economic issue. It is estimated that 124,000 renters in our state contribute more than half of their income to rent. The national standard for housing affordability is thirty percent. Housing insecurity due to affordability difficulties is experienced by people of color and people with disabilities in particular. Racial disparities in housing insecurity are reflected in the fact that Black and Latinx households have disproportionately high rates of eviction and foreclosure. The COVID pandemic has only exacerbated the problem of housing insecurity. Since the federal and state eviction moratoriums expired, Connecticut has seen a dramatic increase in filings, with Hartford, New Haven, Bridgeport, New Britain, and Waterbury impacted the worst. Furthermore, black and brown households have been disproportionately affected, with African Americans three times more likely and Latinx households twice as likely as white household renters to face eviction. Legal representation has an even further dramatic impact, given that households without an

attorney representing them in housing court are twice as likely to receive a removal order than those who do have a lawyer.

Senate Bill 168 represents an exciting opportunity for the Connecticut legislature to prevent housing insecurity in our state in a way that directly addresses systemic racial and economic disparities. Housing is a human right, and policies that respect and protect a right to affordable, safe, and stable housing will serve to stabilize individuals and families, prevent the spread of COVID, and ultimately reduce the homeless census in the state. It would pave the way for the implementation of protective measures well known to be successful in other parts of the country such as counsel in housing court for those facing eviction and foreclosure, homelessness response systems, and mitigating the practices of slumlords engaged in racist practices and practices that compromise housing safety. Connecticut has come a long way from the days of “sundown towns” and redlining, but some exclusionary zoning practices still exist where the prohibition on certain types of construction and minimum unit sizes not tied to safety concerns serve as de facto segregation mechanisms. Minimum size regulations are already prohibited by a 1988 Connecticut Supreme Court ruling, yet continue to be ignored in parts of the state.

This bill will serve to strengthen and support that ruling.

Senate Bill 168 does not represent a “slippery slope” for those who fear a right to housing means a right to guaranteed extravagance at taxpayer expense. What it does provide is a regulatory mechanism for households to maintain stable housing and resist the practices of abusive landlords, to expand housing affordability, accessibility and habitability, and to ensure adequate homeless prevention and housing eviction services. This will further prioritize and deepen the state’s commitment to preventing and reducing the need for temporary shelter and addressing systemic racism.

In closing, NASW-CT urges the committee to vote in favor of *Senate Bill 168: An Act Establishing a Right to Housing*.